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EX-NAVY CHIEF DONG JUN TO BE CHINA'S NEW DEFENCE MINISTER

His appointment comes two months after his predecessor General LI Shangfu was sacked after disappearing from the public eye for two months

ANALYSTS POINT TO HIS SOUTH CHINA SEA LINK

Before becoming the navy's top commander, Dong had served as the deputy commander of its Southern Theater Command, which includes the South China Sea region where Beijing is involved in territorial disputes with neighbours. Analysts say the choice of Dong is a sign of China seeing the South China Sea as a priority area in its geopolitical contest with the US

PREDECESSOR LI'S FATE UNKNOWN

- Dong's promotion also comes at a time when Beijing is upping its military pressure on Taiwan ahead of the presidential elections there
- His predecessor General Li Shangfu was abruptly sacked from the post in October. Three months earlier, Qin Gang, who was then the foreign minister, was also summarily sacked. Their fates are unknown

2021

WHEN DONG JUN WAS APPOINTED AS THE CHINESE NAVY'S TOP COMMANDER

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Reins of JD(U) back with wily Bihar CM Nitish

Lalan out as national president; proximity with Lalu Yadav may have been his nemesis

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

DAYS after this newspaper broke the story of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar assuming the role of Janata Dal (United) chief as well, the party at its national executive meeting here on Friday elected him party president. The change of guard came amid rumours of a possible split in the party. That the party managed to stay intact is a testament to the skills of Nitish, who continues to be the most powerful leader in the JD(U).

Incumbent national president Lalan Singh tendered his resignation. Though there was no official word on why he did so, sources close to the leadership cryptically indicated that Lalan's growing proximity to RJD chief Lalu Yadav was responsible for Nitish's unexpected decision. Sources said Lalan and some other senior leaders had recently suggested that RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav be made Bihar chief minister so that Nitish can fully focus on national politics to take on the BJP in the 2024 general elections.

With Nitish dropping hints about his willingness to take back the reins of party after Lalan's resignation, sources said almost all prominent leaders within the party agreed the CM was the most prominent of the party as well as a candidate to become the Opposition's PM face. So, he must lead the party again.

After being elected party president, Nitish reiterated the party's commitment to work for the state as well the unity of the Opposition. In his typical style, Nitish said he was not personally keen to take over as the party's president. "But I have had to abide by the decision of national executive members, who have endorsed it." When his name was being proposed for the post, slogans like *Desh Ka PM kaise ho, Nitish Kumar Jaise ho* rented the air.

The meet projected Nitish as the "hope of the backwards, extremely backwards, minorities and unemployed youth" and urged bigger parties in the INDIA bloc to show a big heart to make the alliance a success. For his part, Nitish accused the BJP of misleading people for not delivering on its promises. The party also authorised him to take the final call in dealing with allies.

Interestingly, JD(U)'s national spokesperson K C Tyagi said the party will be represented at the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22.

Lalan Singh and Nitish Kumar at the JD(U) meet on Friday | SHEKHAR YADAV

TYAGI ON BJP

Curiously, K C Tyagi said the BJP is not an enemy as "there is no enemy in politics but only disagreements". He, however, categorically ruled out any alliance with the ruling party at the Centre

Union Home Minister Amit Shah interacts with a member of the United Liberation Front of Assam during the signing of tripartite peace accord in Delhi on Friday | PTI

VIOLENCE DOWN BY 87%

Amit Shah said violence is down by 87% in Assam | He claimed that 10,000 people lost their since 1979 in violence by ULFA

CENTRE AND ASSAM GOVT SIGN PEACE PACT WITH ULFA FACTION

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

A tripartite peace accord to end Assam's decades-long insurgency was inked between the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Centre and the Assam government in New Delhi on Friday following years of negotiations.

The pro-talks ULFA faction vowed to shun violence, disband, and join the democratic process. However, the hardline faction, led by Paresh Baruah, is not a part of the accord.

Union home minister Amit Shah, who was present along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the signing of the accords, called it a golden day for Assam.

"The agreement is a significant milestone to fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a peaceful, prosperous and insurgency-free Northeast and bringing everlasting peace, prosperity and all-round development of Assam," he said.

After the accord was signed, representatives of the pro-talks faction said the Centre will take up more than 60 developmental projects in various sectors in Assam in the next five years and a special development package of ₹5,000 crore will be provided.

They said that among their demands is the setting up of land banks from encroachment-free land, allotment of land to landless indigenous communities and the formation of a committee to study the problems faced by tea gardens and their workers. They have also called on the government to treat Assam's flood and soil erosion problems as a national priority.

Shah said all demands will be fulfilled and a panel will be formed to monitor the implementation of the accord.

Legal hitch in deporting eight Indian Navy veterans from Qatar

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

THE deportation of eight naval veterans who are under arrest in Qatar hasn't happened despite both sides signing a treaty in 2015 on the transfer of sentenced prisoners between the two countries.

Arrested on August 30, 2022, the veterans were awarded capital punishment by a trial court a few months ago, but the sentences were on Thursday commuted to between three and 25 years of imprisonment by a Court of Appeal.

The hitch in the transfer of prisoners is possibly because Qatar didn't ratify the treaty. The treaty was signed during the visit of the then Qatari Foreign Minister Dr Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Attiyah. "Once a treaty like this one is signed, both nations have to ratify it. Not sure whether Qatari side ratified it. We did ratify it in India," said MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi.

The ratification window for both sides stays open for 90 days after the accord is signed. Both countries then exchange their ratification documents. However, no such document from Qatar is available with India.

This could possibly be the reason why the naval veterans tried under Qatar law could not be sent to India to serve the rest of their jail term.

"A few months after being kept under detention and in solitary confinement last year, the veterans were asked by the Qatar's ministry of interior to return home in Doha and pack their bags following which they would be sent to India. When they arrived with their bags, they were again placed under detention. It is possible India was exploring their transfer to the country under the agreement but since it wasn't ratified by Qatar, it didn't translate into reality," said a source.

India has signed treaties for transfer of sentenced persons with 35 countries, which include the UK, Mauritius, Bulgaria, France, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Bangladesh, Israel, the UAE, Italy, Turkey, Maldives, Russia, Canada, the US and Venezuela.

The convention on the transfer of sentenced persons is an international treaty regulating the extradition and social rehabilitation of imprisoned persons. The convention was concluded in Strasbourg on March 21, 1983 and came into effect on July 1, 1985.

Infra sector growth slows to six-month low of 7.8%

MONIKA YADAV @ New Delhi

THE growth of India's eight core sectors slowed to 7.8% in November — the lowest in the past six months — official data on Friday showed. In October, the corresponding growth rate stood at 12.1%. In November last year, it was at 5.7%, as per data revised by the ministry.

During the period of April to November, the overall production of the core industries recorded a year-on-year growth of 8.6%, as against 8.1% in the same period in the previous fiscal year.

The decline in core sector growth in November can be primarily attributed to the contraction in the cement sector, which saw a year-on-year decline of 3.6%. Only coal and refinery products demonstrated sequential growth.

On the positive side, fiscal deficit shrank to ₹9.1 lakh crore or 50% of the FY24 budget target in April-November FY24 — from ₹9.8 lakh crore in April-November FY23.

During the April-November period of the previous year, fiscal deficit stood at 58.9% of the budget estimates.

The government aims to limit the fiscal deficit for 2023-24 to ₹17.86 lakh crore, equivalent to 5.9% of the GDP. The plan is to eventually bring it under 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26 as part of the fiscal consolidation strategy.

According to Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist with ICRA Ltd, overall the fiscal deficit target of ₹17.9 lakh for FY24 may not be breached.

"However, a lower nominal GDP than what the Union Budget had penciled in, could result in the fiscal deficit printing at 6% of GDP," she said.

J'KHAND GOVT ANNOUNCES PENSION FOR TRIBALS, DALITS

Ahead of the Lok Sabha and Jharkhand Assembly elections next year, the government of Hemant Soren on Friday announced pension benefits for tribals and Dalits aged 50 and above | P10

5 skeletons found in abandoned Chitradurga house

G SUBHASH CHANDRA @ Chitradurga

FIVE human skeletons have been found in an abandoned house on Old Bengaluru Road near Challakere Gate here.

The police, who found three skeletons on Thursday night, found two more in another room of the house on Friday morning.

The house belonged to retired executive engineer Jagannath Reddy, 80, who hailed from Dodda Siddavvanahalli in Chitradurga taluk. Apart from Jagannath Reddy, his wife Premakka, their daughter Triveni, and sons Krishna Reddy and Narendra Reddy lived in the house, the police said.

The police suspect that the skeletons might be of these persons. However, this will be confirmed only after a thorough examination by the Forensic Science Laboratory.

Police personnel barricade the house on Old Bengaluru Road near Challakere Gate in Chitradurga on Friday after five human skeletons were found | EXPRESS

Jagannath Reddy's family members lived in Tumakuru and Chitradurga and they were not on good terms with their relatives. After the death of Jagannath Reddy, his family members shuttled between Tumakuru and Chitradurga, said a close relative of Jagannath Reddy.

Devaraj, a resident of the locality, said that he along with a few others saw some stray dogs entering the house on Thursday morning. Later, they found a skull outside the house and immediately alerted the police. A police team led by DySP P Anilkumar visited the house after Pavan Kumar, a relative of Jagannath Reddy, lodged a complaint. During the search, the police team also found a dog's skeleton. FSL experts were summoned from Davanagere to examine the skeletons. P7

Edu Minister Madhu Bangarappa convicted in cheque bounce case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

PRIMARY Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangrappa has been convicted in a cheque bounce case by the Special Court for trial of cases filed against sitting and former MPs/MLAs. The minister has been ordered to pay a fine of Rs 6,96,70,000, failing which he has to undergo a simple imprisonment for six months.

Madhu Bangarappa, director of M/s Akash Audio-Video Private Ltd., Kumara Park East, took an Inter-Corporate Deposit (unsecured borrowing) of Rs 6 crore from M/s Rajesh Exports Ltd., in 2010. He had issued a cheque dated July 16, 2011, for Rs 6.60 crore in favour of M/s Rajesh Exports Ltd. The cheque was dishonoured due to insufficient funds in November 2011, following which the firm moved the court. In 2022, Madhu Bangarappa approached the High Court of Karnataka seeking quashing of the proceedings against him. But his petition was dismissed. He made a partial payment of Rs 50 lakh to the complainant when the matter was pending before the high court. He also filed an undertaking before the special court on December 26, 2023, stating that he will make full payment on or before January 30, 2024.

CONTINUED ON: P4

EXPRESS READ

₹5K increment for guest faculty, job regularisation not addressed

Bengaluru: Minister for Higher Education Dr MC Sudhakar on Friday announced that all guest lecturers will receive an increment of Rs 5,000 across all categories, including health insurance and paid leave. However, the issue of job security was not addressed |P4

₹1K cr action plan to be readied for minority housing colonies

Bengaluru: CM Siddaramaiah told officials to formulate an action plan of Rs 1,000 crore to develop housing colonies for Minorities. "A huge number of applications have been received online for various schemes of Minorities, and it was decided to provide more grants," he said |P4